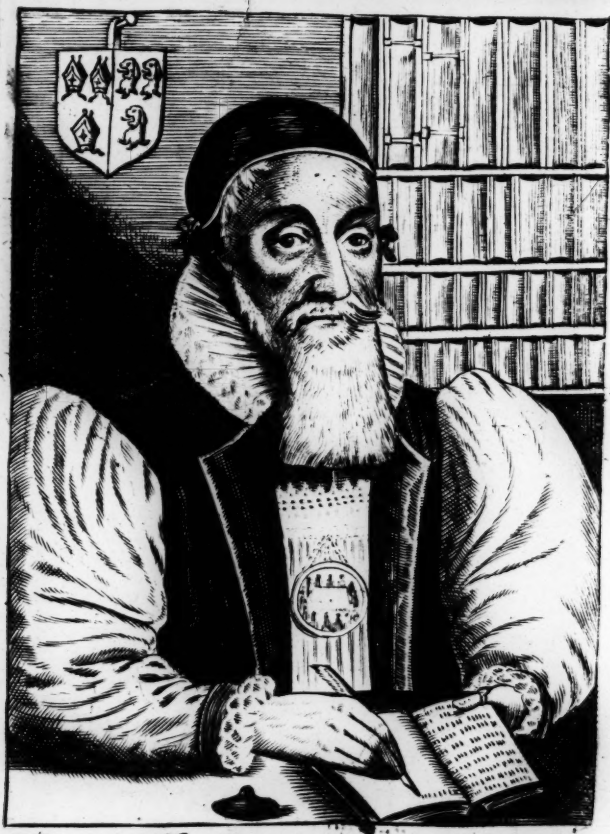


Vera Effigies Reverendi Doⁿⁱ
Iosephi Hall Norwici nuper Episcopi.



Vera Effigies Reverendi Doⁿⁱ
Iosephi Hall Norwici nuper Episcopi.

A
LETTER

Concerning
Christmasse;
Sent to a Knight in
SUFFOLKE:

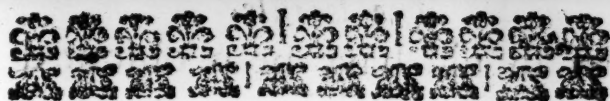
By that Reverent Fa-
ther in God Dr. JOSEPH
HALL, late Lord Bishop
of NORWICH.



London, Printed by E.C. for Fran Grove,
dwelling on Snow-hill. 1659.

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March 9, 1950

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To the Reader.

I Here present you with a true Copie of a Letter sent by Dr. *Joseph Hall*, late of *Norwich Bishop*, to the Right Worshipfull Sir *John Wentworth* Knight, in *Sussex*; And this I averre to be Transcribed by me *John Smith* from the Bishops own hand-writting, and I wish it as good success as *St. Pauls Letter to the Corinthians* had (that you may not read it with prejudice) that ye sorrow Godly, So that in nothing ye be hurt thereby. And rather then this so worthy a Let-

The Epistle.

I should have been obscur'd
one Familie I have ventured it
to the Publi^k; that they may
have the good that was meant to
my Noble friend and Kinsman
efore mentioned, and that that
vmble and meeke Author (and
aint now in *Abrahams*-bosom;
night have his due of all.

Now the Lord grace us with
all Spirituall Blessings, till he
bring us to Glory the perfection
of Grace; for the attainment of
which, together with all External
Prosperity, and Temporal Felici-
tie in this life, You shall never
want the instant Prayer of,

John Smith, Gent.



1 Letter Concerning
Christmass, sent to a
 Knight in *Suffolke*.

By that Reverent Father in God Dr.
 JOSEPH HALL. the late Lord Bishop
 of NORWICH.

Sir, with my loving Remembrance, &c.

I cannot but be a great grieſe to
 any wiſe and moderate Chriſti-
 an, to ſee Zealous and well mean-
 ing ſoules carried away after the
 giddy humour of their new Tea-
 chers, to a contempt of all holy and Rever-
 ent Antiquitie; and to an eager affectation of
 ſtrange Fancies, even whiſt they cry out moſt
 ſternly againſt *Innovation*; when the Practice
 and Judgement of the whole Chriſtian
 World, even from the daies of the bleſſed
 Apoſtles to this preſent Age, is pleaded, for
 any Forme of *Government*, or Laudable Ob-
 ſervation, they are ſtreight taught That old
 things

things are passed, and that all things are become new; making their word good by so new, and unheard of an Interpretation of Scripture, whereby they may as justly argue the introducing of a new Church, a new Gospel, a new Religion, with the annulling of the Old; and that they may not want an all-sufficient Patronage of their fond conceit, our blessed Saviour himself is brought in, who in his Sermon on the Mount controlled the antiquity of the Pharisaical glosses of the Law.

• *Mat. 5. 21, 27.* Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old, thus and thus; but I say unto you thus & thus, & as if the Son of God in checking the upstart Antiquities of a misgrounded & unreasonable tradition, meant to condemn the truly ancient and commendable customs of the whole Christian Church, which all sober and judicious Christians are wont to look upon with meet respect and reverence: and certainly whosoever shall have set down this resolution with himself to sleight those, either Institutions or Practices which are derived to us from the Primitive Times, and have ever since been entertained by the whole Church of Christ upon earth, that man hath laid sufficient foundation of Schismes and dangerous Singularities: And
doth

doth that which the most eminent of the Fathers *St. Augustine*, chargeth with no less then the most insolent madnels, *Insolenti fini est, &c.* For me and my Friends, God give us grace to take the advice which our Saviour gave his Spouse, *To go forth by the footsteps of the flock, and to feed our Kids besides the Shepherds Tents*, Canticle 1.8 And to walk in the sure paths of uncorrupt Antiquity, for the celebration of the Solemn Feast of our Saviours Nativity, Resurrection, Ascension, and the coming down of the Holy Ghost, which you say is cryed down by your Zealous Lecturers: One would think these should be reasons enough in those wonderfull and unspeakable benefits, which those days serve to commemorate unto us; for (to instance in the said Feast of the Nativity) when the Angel brought the news of that blessed Birth to the Jewish shepherds: *Behold (saith he) I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people; for unto you is born this day a Saviour*, Luke 2.10. If then the report of this blessing were the best tidings of the greatest joy that ever was, or ever could be possibly incident unto mankind, why should not the commemoration thereof be answerable: where we conceive the greatest joy,
what

what should hinder us to express it in a joy-
 full Feltivity; but you are taught to say the
 day conferred nothing on the blessing: that
 every day we should with equal thankfulness
 remember this inestimable benefit of the In-
 carnation of the Son of God. So as a set
 Anniversary day is altogether needless. Know
 then and consider, that the all-Wise God,
 who knew it fit that his people should every
 day think of the great work of the Creation,
 and of that miraculous Deliverance of the
Egyptian servitude, and should daily give
 honour to their Almighty Creator and De-
 liverer; yet ordained one day of seven for
 the more special Recognition of these mar-
 vellous works, as well knowing, how apt
 we are to forget those Duties, where with we
 are only encharg'd in common, without the
 designement of a particular renumeration:
 Besides, the same reason will hold pro-
 portionable against any monethly or annual
 Celebration whatsoever: The *Jews* should
 have been much to blame, if they had not
 every Day thankfully remembred the great
 Deliverance which God wrought for them
 from the bloody design of cruel *Haman*: yet
 it was thought requisite, if not necessary,
 that there should be two special days of *Purim*
 set

set apart for the Aniversary memorial of that wonderful preservation, the like may be said for the *English Purins* of *November*. It is well if besides the general tye of our thankfulness, a precise Day ordained by Authority can enough quicken our unthankful dullness to give God his own nor so great a mercy: Shall we say it is the work of the year, what needs a day? As therefore no Day should pass over our heads without a gratefull acknowledgement of the great mysterie of God Incarnate: So withall the wisdom of the Primitive Church, no doubt but by the Direction of the Holy Ghost hath pitched upon one special Day wherein we should intirely devote our thoughts to the Meditation of this Work which the Angels of Heaven cannot enough admire. But we are told, that perhaps we misse of the Day, since the Season is Litigious, uncertain, unknown, and in all likelihood other then our *December*, and that it is purposely not revealed, that it may not be kept.

As to the first, I deny not that the just Day is not certainly known, the great Saviour of the World, that would
have

have his second coming without observation going before it, would have his first coming without observation following it: he meant to come down without noise, without a recorded notice, even in the second hundred so ancient we are sure this Festivity is. There was question and different opinions of the season, the just knowledge and determination whereof, matters nothing at all to the duty of our celebration; most sure we are that such a day there was, and no less sure that it was the happiest day that ever lookt forth into the World: It is all one to us, whether this day, or that, we content our selves with this, that it hath pleased the Church for many hundred years to ordain this day for the Commemoration of that transcendent blessing, what care we to stand upon these 12. hours that made up the Artificial day wherein this wonderfull work was wrought, which we are sure cannot be much changed by so many intercalations, so long and constant a practise of the Christian Church upon so holy grounds, it is no less warrant to us, then if an Angel from heaven should have revealed unto us the just hour of this blessed Nativitie.

As to the second, Surely, whosoever shall
tell

tell you, that God did purposely hide this day from us that it might escape a Celebration, as he concealed the burial of *Moses* to avoid the danger of an Idolatrous Adoration, makes himself a presumptuous Commentator upon the Actions of the Almighty; when did God tell him so? or what Revelation can he pretend for so bold an assertion? If this were the matter, why then did not the same God, with equal caution conceal the day of the Passion, Resurrection, & Ascension of our blessed Saviour, and of the descent of the Holy Ghost, the Observation of all which Days, is with no less vehemency, and upon the same danger cried down by these scrupulous persons; either therefore let him say that God would have these other Feast days observed because he would have them known to the World, or yield that he did not therefore conceal the day of the Nativity of Christ, because he would not have it observed.

But you hear it said, there is Popery and Superstition in keeping that Day. Tell those that suggest so, that they cast a foul slander upon the Saints of God in the Primitive Church, upon the Holy and Learned Fathers, who Preached, and wrote so, and kept the

the Feast of Christs Nativity ; which sacred Solemnity many hundred years before Popery was hatched, and that they little know what wrong they do to Religion and themselves, and what honour they put upon that Superstition which they profess to detest, in ascribing that to Popery which was the meer act of holy and devout Christians.

But to colour this Plea , you are taught that the myserie of Iniquity began early to work, even in the very Apostolick Times ; and that *Antichrist* did secretly put in his claw before his whole body appeared. Surely there is a singular Use wont to be made of this shift by those which would avoid the countenance of all Primitive Authority , to any displeasing (however lawfull and laudible) Institutions and practises : so the *Anabaptists* tells us, that the baptizing of Infants is one of the timely workings of the myserie of Iniquity ; so the blasphemous *Nestorians* of our time tell us that the myserie of the blessed Trinity of persons in the unity of one Godhead , is but an ancier device of *Antichrist*, working under hand before his formal exhibition. Every sort apt to make this Challenge , and therefore it behooves us wisely to distinguish b

twixt those things which men did as good Christians, and those which they did as engaged to their own private, or to the more common Interest of others: What advantage can we conceive it might be to *Anti-christ*, that Christ should have a day celebrated to the memory of his blessed Birth, and that devout Christians should meet together in their Holy Assemblies, to praise God for the benefit of that happy Incarnation: And what other effect could be expected from so Religious a Work, but Glory to GOD and Edification to Men? Who can suppose that the enemy of Christ should gain by the honour done to Christ? Away therefore with this groundless Imagination, and let us be so Popish, so Superstitious, as those holy Fathers, and Doctors of the Primitive Church, famous for Learning and Piety, who Lived and Died devout Observers of this Christian Festival.

But you are bidden to aske what warrant we find in the Word of God (which is to be the rule of all our actions) for the solemn keeping of this Day? In answer you may tell that *Questi-nist*, that to argue from the Scripture Negatively in things of this nature is somewhat Untheological. Aske you him a-

gain with better reason, what Scripture he findes to forbid it, for if that be unlawfull to be done, which is not in Gods Word commanded, then much rather that which is not there forbidden, cannot be unlawfull to be done: Generall grounds of Edification, Decency, peaceable Conformity to the Injunctions of our Spiritual Governors, are in these Cases more then enough to build our Practice upon: If it be Replyed that we are Injoynd six dayes to Labour, and forbidden to observe Dayes and Times as being part of the *Jewish* Pedægogie (two common pretences with which the eyes of the Ignorant are wont to be bleared) know that for the first, it is not so much Preceptive, as Permissive, neither was it the intentions of the Almighty to interpose the command of Humane affaires in the first Table of his Royal Law, wherein Himselfe and his Service is immediately concern'd, in such like expressions; mayst, and shalt, are equivalent and promiscuously used, that instance is clear and pregnant, Gen. 2. 16. *The Lord, (saith the Text) commanded the man, Saying, Eating thou shalt eat of every Tree in the Garden,* which our last Version renders well to the sense: *Thou mayst freely eat of every tree*
of

of the *Garden*. And if that charge in the 4th. Commandment were absolute and peremptory, what Humane Authority could dispense with those large threds of Time, which we usually cut out of the six days for Sacred occasions, what warrant could we have to intermit our work for a daily Lecture; or a monethly Fast, or for an Aniversary *Fifth of November*; And if notwithstanding this command of God it be allowed to be in the power of man, whether Sovereign (as *Constantine* appropriated it) or Spiritual, to ordain the setting of some set parcels of time to holy uses, why should it be stuck at in the Appropriating and Observing the Pious and usefull Celebration of this Festival. As for that other suggestion of the Apostles taxation of observing Days and Times; any one that hath but half an eye may see that it hath respect to those Judaical Holy days, which were part of the Ceremonial Law, now long since out of date, as being of Typical signification, and shadows of things to come, should we therefore go about to revive those *Jewish* Feasts, or did we erect any new day to an essential part of the worship of God? or place holiness in it as such? We should justly incur that blame which the Apostles cast upon the *Galatians* and *Colossians*, *False Teachers*; but to wrest this forbiddance to a Christian solemn Purity, which

is meerly commemoration of a blessing received, without any prefiguration of things to come, without any opinion of holiness annexed to the day, is no other then injurious violence.

Vpon all this which hath been said, and upon a serious weighing of what ever may be further alledged to the contrary, I dare confidently affirm that there is no just reason why good Christians should not withall godly cheerfulness observe this, which that holy Father stiled the *Metropolis* of all Feasts, to which I add that those, which by their Example and Doctrine sleight this Day, causing their People to dishonour it with their worl cloaths, with shops open, with servile works, stand guilty before God of an high and sinfull contempt of that lawfull Authority under which they live; for as much by the Statutes of our Land made by the full concurrence of King and State: This is commanded to be kept holy by all *English* Subjects, and this power is backed by the charge of God; *Submit your selves to every Ordinance of man for the Lords sake.*

If now after all this I should let my Pen loose to the suffragant Testimonies, whether of Antiquity, or Modern Divines, and Reformed Churches, I should tire your patience, and instead of a Letter send you a Volume; let it suffice, that ever since the second 100 years

years after Christ, this Feast hath without contradiction obtained due respect in the Church of God, & received many noble Elogies and passionate inforcements from the Learned and holy Fathers of the Church, amongst the rest that of *Gregory Nazianzen* [in his O-rations upon the Day of the Nativity of Christ] is so remarkable, that I may not omit it, as that which sets forth the excess of joyfull respect wherewith the Ancient Christians were wont to keep this day. Let us saith he,

“Celebrate this Feast, not in a Panegyricall,
 “but Divine, not in a worldly, but superse-
 “lar manner: not regarding so much our selvs,
 “or others; as the worship of Christ, and how
 “shall we effect this? not with Crowning
 “our doors with Garlands, nor leading of
 “Dances, nor adorning our Streets, not by
 “feeding our eyes, not by delighting our ears
 “with pleasant Songs, not by effeminating our
 “smell with perfumes, not with humouring
 “our taste with dainties, not with pleasing
 “our touch, not with silken & costly cloaths,
 “and not with the sparkling Jewels, not with
 “the luster of Gold, not with the artifice of
 “counterfeit colours; let us leave these things
 “to Pagans; for their pomp, &c. But we who
 “adore the word of the Father, if we think
 “fit to affect delicacies, let us feed our selves
 “with the dainties of the Law of God, and

"with those Divine Discourses, especial-
 "which are fitting for this present Festival.
 So that Learned and eloquent Father to his
Auditors of Constantinople, where to, let me (if
 you please) have leave to add one or two
 practical instances, one shall be of the good
 Emperour *Theodosius*, lying now for eight
 moneths under the severe Censure of Bishop
Ambrose, when the Feast of the Nativity drew
 neer, what moan did that Religious Prince
 make to his Courtiers, that he was by that
 resolute Bishop shut out (for his blood-guil-
 tinels) from partaking with the assembly in
 that holy Service, and what importunate
 means did he make for his admission, *Hist.*
tri. partit. lib. 9. cap. 30. Had that gracious
 Emperour been of the Diet of these our new
 Divines he would have sleighted that repulse,
 and gladly taken this occasion of absense
 from that Superstitious Solemnity, or had
 one of these grave Monitors been at his el-
 bow, he might have saved that pious Prince
 the expence of many sighs and tears, which
 now he bestowed upon his abstention from
 that dearly affected Devotion. The other shall
 be a History of as much note, as horror, too
 clear a prooffe of the ancient Celebration of
 this Festival, it was under the Tyranny of
Dioclesian, and his Co-partner *Maximinus*,
Nicephor. 1. 7. ca. 6. that 20000. Christi-
 ans

ans met to Celebrate the Feast of this Nativity in the large Church of *Nicomedia*, which were made an *Holocaust*, and burnt together with that goodly Fabrick to ashes on that day ; Lo so great a multitude as 20000. Christians, of all ages, of both Sexes, had not thus mett together in a time of so mortal danger, to celebrate this Feast, if the holy Zeal of their duty had not told them they ought to keep that day, which these *Novellers* teach us to contemne.

Now let these bold men see, of how contrary a disposition they are to those, blessed Martyrs, which as this day sent up their Soules (like *Noahs* Angel) to Heaven in those flames.

After thus much said, I should be glad to know (since reason there can be none) what Authority induces these Gain-sayers to oppose so ancient & received a Custome in the Church of God ; you tell me of a double Testimony cyted to this purpose, the one of *Socrates* the Historian, which I suppose is fetched out of the 5th. Book of *Ecclesiastical Story Chap. 21.* where upon occasion of the Feast of *Easter*, he passeth his Judgement upon the indifferent nature of all those ancient Feasts which were of use in the *Primitive Times*, shewing, that the Apostles never meant to make any Law for the keeping them, but left men to the free observation thereof.

For Answer whereunto, I do not tell you that this Author is wont to be impeached of *Novatianism*,

vationism, and therefore may seem fit to yield
Patronage to such a Clyent; I rather say, that
 take him at the worst, he is no enemy to our o-
 pinion, or Practice, we agree with him that the
 Apostles would have men free from servitude of
 the Jewish observation of days, that they en-
 acted no Law for set Festivals, but left persons
 and places so to their liberty in these Cases, that
 none should impose a necessity upon others; this
 were to be pressed upon *Victor* Bishop of *Rome*,
 who violently obtruded a day for the Celebrati-
 on of *Easter* upon all Churches (supposing in
 the mean time an *Easter* universally kept of all
 Christians, though not on the same day.) This
 makes nothing against us, who place no Holi-
 ness in the very hours, nor plead any Apostoli-
 call injunction for days, nor tye any person, or
 Church to our strict *Calender*, but only hold it
 fit out of obedience to the Laws both of our
 Church and Kingdom, to continue a joyfull Ce-
 lebration of a memorial Day to the honour of
 our blessed Sayiour: But that other Authority
 which you tell me was urged to this purpose, I
 confess doth not a little amaze me: it was, you
 say, of K. *James* our Learned Sovereign of late
 & blessed memory, whose testimony was brought
 in before the credulous people (not without the
 just applause of a *Solomon-like-wisdom*) as cry-
 ing down these Festivals: and in a certain Speech
 of his applauding the purity of the Church of

Scotland

Scotland above that of *Geneva*, for that it observed not the common Feasts of **Christs** Nativity & Resurrection, &c. Is it possible, that any mouth could name that wise and good King, in such a cause, whom all the world knows to have been as zealous a Patron of these Festivals, as any lived upon earth; and if he had let fall any such Speech before he had any Down upon his chin, & whiles he was under the Ferule, what candor is it to produce it now to the contradiction of his better experience, and riper judgement: Nay, is it not famously known that it was one of the main errands of his journey into his Native Kingdom of *Scotland*, to reduce that Church into a conformity to the rest of the Churches of Christendom in the observation of these Solemn Dayes, and to this purpose was it not one of the main businesses which he set on work in the Assembly at *Perth*. [One of the 5. Articles of *Perth*] And wherein he employed the service of his worthy Chaplain, Dr. *Young* Dean of *Winchester*, to recall and re-establish these Festivals. And accordingly in pursuance of his Majesties earnest desires this way, was it not enacted in that Assembly, that the said Feasts should be duly kept? Doubtless it was, & that not without much wise care & holy caution, which act because it cannot be had every where, and is well worthy of your notice: and that which clears the point in hand, I have thought good here to insert: The tenor of it, therefore

fore is this, *As we abhor the superstitious observation of Festivall days by the Papist : and detest all licentious and prophane abuse thereof, by the common sort of professors, so we think that the inestimable benefits received from God by our Lord Iesus Christs Birth, Passion, Resurrection, Ascension, and sending down of the Holy Ghost, was commendably and godly remembered at certain particular days, and times, by the whole Churches of the World, and may be also now; therefore the Assembly ordains that every Minister shall upon these days have the commemoration of the aforesaid inestimable benefits, and make choice of severall pertinent Texts of Scripture, and frame their doctrine and Exhortations thereto, and rebuke all Superstitious observation, & licentious prophanation thereof.* I could, if it were needfull, give you other proofs of K. James his zeal for these days: but what should I spend time in proving there is a Sun in the Heaven, & light in the Sun, the name of that great King suffereth for his exces this way. Seeing then the Church of God, his anointed Law, Antiquity, and Reason, are for us in this point, and I doubt not but we wil gladly be on their side) Away with all Innovations and frivolous quarrels, we were divided enough before, and little needed any new rents; the God of Peace quiet all these distempers, and unite our hearts one to another, and all to Himself; Farewell in the Lord.

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